



FEMA

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News Release

FEMA Helping Families into Long-Term Housing

Effort to reach everyone evacuated continues in long-term housing plan

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Less than one percent of the more than 321,000 evacuees once in congregate shelters following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita remain in such shelters today, and virtually all of the congregate shelters are now located in just three states. The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is working closely with state and local officials to reach evacuees that still occupy short-term lodging, including shelters, hotels and motels. To date, FEMA has provided nearly \$4.4 billion to almost 1.4 million families to help victims of these storms get back on their feet.

As a result of such assistance, and thousands of hours of service from compassionate Americans, the number of evacuees in hotel and motel rooms across the country has also dropped dramatically. However, evacuated families still occupy more than 53,000 hotel rooms, largely in Texas, Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi. In cooperation with state and local partners, FEMA has developed an unprecedented effort to assist this population of evacuees with long-term housing. Finding longer-term housing for all evacuees is the agency's highest housing priority, and FEMA is actively reaching out to all 53,000 families.

"Hurricanes Katrina and Rita created unprecedented housing needs, including record emergency use of congregate shelters, hotels and motels for sheltering. There are still too many people living in hotel rooms, and we want to help them get into longer-term homes before the holidays," said Acting FEMA Director David Paulison. "Across the country, there are readily available, longer-term housing solutions for these victims that can give greater privacy and stability than hotel and motel rooms."

"With our state and local partners, FEMA is working to inform individuals and families about their options and provide resources and tools to make this important and necessary transition to rebuild their lives," said Paulison. "Those affected by these storms should have the opportunity to become self-reliant again and reclaim some normalcy in their lives."

On December 1, 2005 -- the previously announced conclusion for FEMA's direct payment hotel/motel program -- direct federal emergency assistance reimbursements for hotel and motel rooms occupied by evacuees will end. FEMA has an aggressive plan to help place these families in longer-term housing prior to December 1.

To date, FEMA has provided more than 500,000 households a total of \$1.2 billion in transitional housing assistance. These funds were designed to offer those forced out of their communities and neighborhoods the flexibility to choose where to relocate and re-establish their lives. After December 1, for example, evacuees eligible for FEMA individual assistance payments, including transitional housing, could use their own grants

to pay directly for temporary housing in hotels and motels or for transitional housing such as apartments or rental houses.

However, in Louisiana and Mississippi, where much of the housing stock was destroyed in the storms, available housing is still scarce. In those two states, the lead FEMA recovery official for the state has been given temporary hotel and motel reimbursement waiver authority. That authority will allow for short-term extensions of direct payments for hotel and motel rooms, as needed for the approximately 12,000 hotel and motel rooms occupied by evacuees in those two states.

Evacuees will continue to be assisted with a broad range of federal, state, local and private-sector programs aimed to ease transition to longer-term housing, including the recently announced effort to contact the estimated 60,000 households in Mississippi and Louisiana whose homes were determined to be completely destroyed using sophisticated aerial mapping.

In order to communicate all available options, FEMA is also reaching out to evacuees with public service announcements through local media, and distributing flyers to all of the hotels and motels in the program. Evacuees are also being contacted directly by state, voluntary organizations and FEMA representatives visiting hotels and motels. Currently 127 Disaster Recovery Centers are open in five Gulf Coast states from Texas to Florida offering another way to reach out to FEMA for assistance with housing. FEMA has also set up a housing referral service. Evacuees can call 1-800-762-8740 (TTY 1-800-462-7585) daily from 8 am to 9 pm EST for assistance in finding housing across the country. Contacted evacuees will be asked to register with FEMA, if they have not already.

Evacuees who have not yet registered with FEMA may be eligible for FEMA's rental assistance program, which covers certain households displaced by Rita or Katrina who were formerly homeowners or renters in the impacted areas. For individuals and families who were displaced from federally subsidized low-income housing by Rita or Katrina or for displaced homeless persons, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has a similar housing assistance program that can also be provided by registering with FEMA.

For other needs that cannot be directly met by FEMA, such as financial counseling, unemployment assistance, job locators and other social services, evacuees will be referred to appropriate state, local and voluntary organizations.

These efforts will also be complemented by the \$66 million case management grant recently awarded by FEMA to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). The case management program, involving a nationwide system of 3,000 case managers, is dedicated to assisting disaster survivors with unmet needs, from longer-term housing to social services. This national network of trained individuals working through a shared computer system will offer the connections needed for national coordination.

States and localities have worked hard to assist evacuees to move from shelters, hotels, motels and other short-term living situations into apartments and other longer-term housing. Using emergency assistance funds provided by FEMA to a record 44 states and the District of Columbia, some have sponsored placement of evacuees directly into apartments. FEMA will continue to support these approved placement programs for leases signed by December 1.

By no later than March 1, 2006, six months after Hurricane Katrina, apartment leases initially co-signed by state or local authorities must be assumed by the occupant, if the occupant elects to remain in the apartment. After March 1, 2006, FEMA emergency assistance reimbursements to state or local governments in these cases will end. Fees associated with termination of leases sponsored by any such state or local may be reimbursed by FEMA.

All evacuees who need help finding housing may contact FEMA's housing locator service (1-800-762-8740; TTY 1-800-462-7585 – open daily from 8 am – 9 pm EST). For other forms of assistance, evacuees may contact FEMA's help line (1-800-621-FEMA or TTY 1-800-462-7585) or a nearby Disaster Recovery Center to learn more about alternative housing options and referral services. For information about HUD programs, call 1-800-955-2232 (TTY is 1-800-877-8339) for general inquiries and 1-866-373-9509 (TTY 1-800-877-8339) for affected families to learn about the Katrina Disaster Housing Assistance Program.

FEMA prepares the nation for all hazards and manages federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates mitigation activities, trains first responders, works with state and local emergency managers, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program.

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